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cepted the honor because during dinner Venables told me that if I became Poet Laureate I should always, when I dined out, be offered the liver wing of the chicken." Tennyson described with some acidity in an early poem, "A Character," Sunderland, one of the most brilliant men at Cambridge. When the latter was told that he was the person the poet had in mind he said: "Oh, really? And *which* Tennyson did you say wrote it? The slovenly one?"

Mrs. Brookfield, to whom Thackeray wrote some of those characteristic notes in which every line is a stroke of art, has written a book of rare interest largely in the words of the men she describes; so much of their speech is imbedded in her narrative, that the only adequate account of her book must be mainly a matter of quotation.

HAMILTON W. MABIE.

BRUNETIERE'S BALZAC.*

BRUNETIERE'S volume in the French Men of Letters Series will mark an important epoch in the history of Balzac. The creator of the "Human Comedy" is here acknowledged as the greatest novelist in all literature; the most considerable factor in the evolution not only of the novel itself, but also of later criticism and history. With novelists themselves and with the reading public generally the tide had long since turned in his favor. Yet French criticism proper has been slow to accept Balzac as literature. This is a more serious matter than might appear at first blush; for we have Brunetière's own authority for the statement that "In France, the adoption of an author by university criticism usually sanctions him as a writer; and, at all events, it puts him in the way of becoming a classic."

The book will certainly arouse much controversy. There are whole chapters that ring like a challenge, and many who will accept the author's conclusions will refuse to follow him through the steps of his demonstration. It has from the first been a temperamental impossibility for Brunetière to understand the attitude of those who differed with him. This is the secret of his strength, of his originality, of his pugnacity, of his dogmatism, and frequent accusations. For him in questions of æsthetics there

* "Honoré de Balzac," by Ferdinand Brunetière. The French Men of Letters Series. Edited by Alexander Jessup, Litt.D. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1906.

can be but one honest and correct judgment. He is, as we shall see presently, capable of writing a volume like the present searching study to prove that in making a very strong critical pronouncement, he is saying "nothing but the absolute and exact truth." It is this that makes him interesting. It is this, too, that in spite of his theory of the critic's impersonality makes him unfair. In the present case he is particularly unfair to the romanticists and refuses to acknowledge for Balzac any serious indebtedness to them. Yet they had at least fought in France the War of Liberation; passion and imagination were now to have their sway, and Balzac certainly enjoyed the freedom they had won. Nay, more, his stupendous conceptions, "The Quest of the Absolute," "The Wild Ass's Skin," Grandet's tremendous fortune, are essentially romantic. And if he did not write like the masters of that school, it was not because he did not lust for their styles or because he was above copying sentence after sentence and paragraph after paragraph from their nimblest craftsman, Théophile Gautier. Those who are interested can find a fairly complete record of these borrowings in the study of that ardent Balzacian, Lovenjoul (*"Histoire des Œuvres de Balzac,"* p. 397). Although the book, as Brunetière's bibliography shows, was known to him, he passes these facts in silence. And yet they are interesting. Not because they take us behind the scenes and reveal a petty theft. Indeed, it may very well have been done with Gautier's connivance, for it was this same generous "Théo" who contributed the good verses that were to appear in Balzac's "Lost Illusions." It is interesting because it throws light upon the question of Balzac's style. This is the side of his work which we feel Brunetière has not treated adequately. We admire Balzac. We agree that he is the greatest novelist in all history. And let us be just to this titanic opifex. Literature can count no more devoted slave. He carried an enormous stick with a turquoise head on which he had engraved the motto of a Sultan, "I am a demolisher of obstacles." He is familiar to all posterity in his long Dominican frock, with its gold chain about his waist, working like one of the Cyclops under his seven-branched candlestick from midnight to morning, sustaining himself with long draughts of coffee. Brunetière is right in transferring to him the phrase Michelet had applied to Dumas. He was a "force of nature." What tremendous labors these were, we can learn from

a contemporary who had often seen him at work. Perhaps in this case the admirer has sacrificed a little of the strict truth in the interest of the picturesque:

"Then there began a struggle more terrible than the struggle of Jacob with the Angel, that of the form and the idea. In these battles of every night, from which he emerged exhausted but a conqueror in the morning, when the spent fire made the air of his room cold, his head smoked and from his body a visible mist was exhaled as from a horse's body in winter."

It is almost necessary to say that this is not given by its author as caricature, but in all seriousness as an authentic portrait. It is a matter of record that he wrote and rewrote his proofs ten and twelve times, and that each time they were so full of lines and stars and crosses that they looked like a piece of fireworks. He cannot therefore be accused of negligence or carelessness. Yet it is not the duty of the critic to praise us for our good intentions, and even of these Brunetière says nothing. The fact remains that Balzac often could and did write badly, he could on occasion write execrably, and the casual reader can convince himself of this by glancing at the opening paragraph of "*The Lily in the Valley*," which even Taine, its author's champion, was forced to ridicule. Brunetière himself reproduces it in part. Yet what is his verdict on this man's style? "Style," we are told, "is a quality previously reputed literary," and of Balzac, "He wrote neither well nor badly, he wrote as he had to." The philosophy of determinism is beginning to lose itself in words. If this is true of Balzac is it not also true of the meanest hewer of wood and drawer of water in the literary world? Shall we no longer say that in comparison with Gautier, whom he tried so hard to imitate, in comparison with Hugo, with Mérimée, with George Sand, Balzac wrote badly? To have succeeded finally in climbing Boileau's Parnassus against such staggering odds, should, in a sense, redound to the greater glory of Balzac.

If, then, the "method" is occasionally discomfiting and unfair, the conclusions are certainly noteworthy. Brunetière has gone farther even than Taine. This is his thesis:

"If it be true of Molière that he was not only the greatest of comic authors, but 'comedy' itself, it may be said of Balzac that he was not only the greatest, the most fertile and diverse of our novelists, but the 'novel' itself; and the object of the present vol-

ume is to show that in saying this *I say nothing but the absolute and exact truth.*"

It is the fullest recognition that Balzac has yet received from technical criticism. It is, furthermore, a profound study of the evolution of the novel. Balzac created the "type" and succeeding novelists have accepted it as their pattern. The critic agrees that he often failed egregiously, and with much discrimination separates the failures from the masterpieces. In cases where he did fail, however, Brunetière usually absolves the creator of the "Human Comedy" by loading his sins upon the scapegoat Romanticism, and once again, not without a certain sense of triumph, driving that unclean beast into the desert. One must be on his guard against Brunetière's prejudices, for with him they have all become convictions. As a critic he is remarkable, not for his fairness, but for the strength and originality of his conceptions. By a single illuminating judgment, he repeatedly throws a long light down a dark vista of literary history, and his erudition is astounding. In that most admirable study, which, we believe, will be his monument, "The Evolution of Lyric Poetry in France," he was still willing to take his scientific terminology metaphorically, as it were. Unfortunately he seems now to have gone a step farther, and in spite of his protest to the contrary, must demand its literal acceptance. He considers his subject-matter exactly as would a natural scientist. Having spoken of Balzac as a force of nature, he treats his work as the product of unconscious nature. There is very little, too little we should say, about Balzac himself. Of his style we saw that he can tell us that "he wrote as he had to." This ceases to be adequate, and we fear that the law is being fulfilled, that a theory is at last claiming as its martyr a great critic. Interesting and important as his book is, we feel that it would have carried farther had its author never become involved in literary Darwinism. By his recent death France has lost her greatest critic since Taine, and his place cannot be taken by any of his contemporaries.

CHRISTIAN GAUSS.